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(1) US Assistant Secretary of State Hill calls on DPRK to "swiftly implement "preliminary steps," adding, "Implementation should be carried out in a few weeks"

MAINICHI (Page 1) (Full)
Eve., February 6, 2007

Takayasu Ogura

Ahead of the next round of the six-party talks to reconvene on Feb. 8, US chief negotiator Christopher Hill, assistant secretary of state, today gave an interview to the press corps, including the Mainichi Shimbun, at the US Embassy in Tokyo. In the session, Hill indicated that after discussions on "preliminary steps" for North Korea to dismantle its nuclear arms programs, those steps should be implemented in a few weeks. Hill continued, "It is a good sign that North Korea has now become willing to return to the multilateral talks. There was also a good sign in the (US-North Korea) talks in Berlin (in January)." He thus indicated that he was optimistic about the implementation of "preliminary steps."

When asked in what form an agreement would be announced if such were reached in the resumed six-party talks, Hill stated; "It would be fine to announce it in the form of a chairman's statement or a joint statement, but I think an agreement should be announced in the form of obligating the member nations to do the following."

Moreover, Hill indicated that what should be done in addition to

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"preliminary steps" must be mentioned in the (statement) and noted that as a medium-term form of discussions, "We may establish working groups."

Regarding the working groups, Hill revealed the notion of having every member in the six-party talks serve as chair of a working group and stated, "The chairman's post managing all the discussions will be held by China," indicating that it was desirable to advance discussions in line with the current form.

When asked whether North Korea is reportedly calling for a supply of 500,000 tons or more of heavy oil in return for it to dismantle its nuclear development-related facilities, Hill expressed displeasure at such a rumor flying around, saying: "Even in the talks in Berlin, such a matter did not crop up. I don't know who said such a thing, but I won't comment on it."

(2) Foreign minister's remark critical of US Iraq policy might be aimed to constrain US request for Japan's cost-sharing in war against terrorism

SANKEI (Page 5) (Full)
February 6, 2007

Foreign Minister Taro Aso called the Bush administration's Iraq policy "extremely naive." In the government, many officials wonder why the foreign minister made such a remark criticizing the US government just ahead of the planned visit to Japan by Vice President Cheney on Feb. 20, and just after Defense Minister Fumio Kyuma uttered his criticism of the US. The US is now being pressed to significantly increase its antiterrorism budget. It is conceivable that the US will ask Japan to partially foot the global war-on-terror bill. Keeping such a possibility in mind, a government source said, "Aso might have tried in his own way to head that off."

"His real aim may have been to underscore that Japan can contribute to peace building." "He did not say that the use of force was a mistake." In a press conference yesterday, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuhisa Shiozaki thus defended Aso's remark in an attempt to dismiss the concern about a negative impact of the remark on Japan-US relations, prior to the planned Japan visit by the US vice

president. Shiozaki, though, added, "I think his words were somewhat inappropriate."

Administrative Vice Foreign Minister Shotaro Yachi said, "His remark was not intended to deny the US military's strenuous efforts to stabilize the security situation in Iraq." He added, "Since the US might feel apprehensive (about Aso's remark), we have given our explanation in a businesslike manner."

The Prime Minister's Office (Kantei) and the Foreign Ministry have both defended Aso's controversial remark. Behind their stance is President Bush's own recognition in a speech in January that his efforts to maintain security in Iraq had failed and his appeal for understanding for his policy switch.

Aso has insisted since the time he was internal affairs and communications minister in the former Koizumi administration, "The Iraqis should take charge of maintaining security in their country." On postwar security policy in Iraq, as well, Aso is quoted as telling his aides, "Compared with General MacArthur, who ran the occupation of Japan, while keeping the Emperor and the bureaucracy

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in place, the Bush administration's policy seems naive."

However, a close aide to the foreign minister said, "The recent remark by Aso was not intended to criticize the US but was based on what President Bush said in his speech."

The Bush administration requested in his budget message for FY2008 (October 2007 - September 2008) that outlays for fighting terrorism should be significantly increased. Focusing on this, some officials in the Foreign Ministry believe that the foreign minister might have tried to prevent the US from coming up with another request for Japan to share the cost." Prime Minister Shinzo Abe also told reporters at the Kantei last night: "Aso's remark means that Japan must fulfill its responsibility in the international community," denying the remark was intended to criticize the US.

Prime Minister Abe told cabinet ministers on Feb. 1: "Take a grip on yourselves so as to avoid giving the impression of disunity in the cabinet." In the Foreign Ministry, too, some are overheard expressing concerns about an impact on Japan-US relations of the series of controversial statements by cabinet ministers.

Preoccupied with explaining Kyuma's calling the Iraq war "a mistake," the Defense Ministry has also been in a great quandary, with a senior official saying, "What is going on when even the foreign minister makes a remark that rubs the US the wrong way. Japan will be in a fix if the situation in the Middle East turns into chaos."

(3) Ruling coalition members unhappy with Prime Minister Abe, with one member calling him as "impervious to public opinion" as many unaffiliated voters supported opposition backed candidate in Aichi gubernatorial race, moving away from LDP

MAINICHI (Page 2) (Full)
February 6, 2007

In the Aichi gubernatorial election on Feb. 4, the candidate backed by the ruling parties faced an unexpected uphill battle, although he won the race. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe as a result is being forced to come up with a strategy of winning voters unaffiliated with any party in the July House of Councillors election. Health, Labor and Welfare Minister Hakuo Yanagisawa's remark referring to women as baby-bearing machines is regarded as the main reason for making unaffiliated voters distance themselves from the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). Some in the ruling coalition have expressed unhappiness with the Prime Minister's Official Residence (Kantei), which has supported Yanagisawa, calling the Kantei officials, "impervious to public opinion." They have also pointed out gaps between the public opinion and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who has advocated constitutional reform as the main campaign issue for the Upper House election.

Yoichi Masuzoe, LDP Upper House Caucus policy chief, who will seek a reelection in the summer election, said: "The Kantei is impervious to the public opinion and the prime minister acts like the proverbial Emperor's New Clothes." In an interview to the Mainichi Shimbun yesterday, he severely criticized Abe, saying, "There are gaps between public opinion" and Abe, who puts up the political slogan of "creating a beautiful country." The ruling camp probably sees the outcome of the Aichi gubernatorial race as a typical example of the Kantei being impervious to the public opinion. Worrying about the negative impact of Yanagisawa's controversial

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remark, calls in the LDP for his resignation were floated at an early stage,. However, Abe has never stopped supporting him. In the Kantei, such optimistic views are now spreading: "It did not have a negative impact on the local elections," said a senior official; and an Abe aide chimed in: "We won the race even though it was a bitter fight. We will take the offensive.

The ruling camp has not taken the Kantei's views seriously. A senior LDP Upper House member spoke distinctly: "Since Yanagisawa's remark had a significant impact, we will be forced to engage in a tough struggle in the Upper House election." Concern is now being widespread in the LDP that the party will find it difficult to win the election as local assembly members are upset about the Yanagisawa comment. The ruling camp's distrust in Abe has spilled over into his strategy for the July Upper House election. Abe has consistently attached top priority to constitutional amendments and the revitalizing of the education system connected to the shape of a state, but the Abe cabinet approval rate has continued to drop. A senior Koga faction member pointed out: "The public needs policies that deal with their daily lives. We cannot win the election on foreign policy and views of the state." Regarding the issue of narrowing the income gap in society, which Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan) has advocated, Abe has insisted on a strategy of increasing the level of wages through economic growth. A government source lamented: "Because the prime minister uses difficult words, some say that his cabinet makes no sense to the common people."

Abe strongly reacted against Masuzoe's calling him impervious to public opinion, telling reporters last night: "I don't think so." A source familiar with the New Komeito, however, called on Abe to review his strategy, saying, "He should consider well the reasons why unaffiliated voters, whom former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi had drawn to the LDP, now shy away from the party."

(4) LDP vexed by swing voters turning away from party

ASAHI (Page 4) (Abridged)
February 6, 2007

The candidate backed by the Liberal Democratic Party and the New Komeito narrowly won the Aichi gubernatorial election on Feb. 4. But in the Kitakyushu mayoral race, the candidate supported by the major opposition Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan) defeated the candidate backed by the two ruling parties, exposing unaffiliated voters' strong discontent with the ruling coalition. In the election two weeks earlier, residents of Miyazaki Prefecture elected as their governor former TV comedian Sonomanma Higashi, whose real name is Hideo Higashikokubaru. Although the ruling coalition has identified Higashikokubaru's victory as a special case resulting from a schism in conservative forces, the two ruling parties are fearful that they will be forced to fight uphill battles in the upcoming national elections. Minshuto, on the other hand, has gained confidence from the Kitakyushu race, although it had failed to attract swing voters in Miyazaki.

Nakagawa calls for Abe's strong leadership

In an executive meeting last evening, LDP Secretary General Hidenao Nakagawa explained the Feb. 4 elections this way: "In Aichi, the opposition candidate garnered more young voters than the ruling candidate did. In Kitakyushu, about 30% of LDP supporters voted for the opposition candidate."

He also indicated that the LDP would closely analyze every district to step up responses under the initiative of district leaders. His words reflected the party's determination not to repeat the same mistakes in the upcoming Upper House election in which the LDP-New Komeito coalition is expected to clash with Minshuto head on.

In the wake of Higashikokubaru's victory in the Miyazaki gubernatorial race in January, the LDP leadership concluded the need to carefully determine its candidates, ascribing the party's defeat to its failure to field a unified candidate.

In the Kitakyushu election, a Minshuto-backed candidate without any celebrity status achieved victory owing to support by a large number of unaffiliated voters. Such can no longer be identified as a special case by the LDP.

Asahi Shimbun exit polls showed that floating voters, especially young voters, threw their weight behind the Minshuto candidates.

In Aichi, the Minshuto-backed candidate garnered 55% of the unaffiliated votes against the LDP-New Komeito candidate's 38%. In Kitakyushu, 57% of the swing votes -- more than double the coalition candidate's 26% -- went to the Minshuto-endorsed candidate who won the race. Furthermore, those who voted for the Minshuto candidate were mostly in their twenties to forties.

What can the ruling coalition do to stop such a trend? "There are no effective means for unaffiliated voters. First of all, the support rate must be raised," commended a senior LDP lawmaker responsible for election campaigning.

Secretary General Nakagawa briefed Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on the

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results of the Aichi and Kitakyushu elections at the Prime Minister's Official Residence (Kantei) yesterday afternoon. Nakagawa also said to Abe: "You should display leadership, without reserve. We will firmly support you."

Nakagawa's unusual advice came against the backdrop of a Kyodo News Service weekend opinion survey in which 30.4% of respondents -- up from 21.9% from the previous month -- pointed out the prime minister's lack of leadership. Subsequently, Nakagawa expressed a sense of alarm to reporters, saying, "This figure must be taken seriously."

The LDP and New Komeito leaderships' plan was to garner additional votes on the strength of Abe's popularity in the Upper House election, while solidifying their organizations. But with many unaffiliated voters turning away from the ruling coalition amid the declining cabinet support rate, the LDP and the New Komeito may have to change their strategy altogether.

Another LDP election campaign official took this view: "No matter how hard we work to cultivate new organizations, we won't be able to stop the trend of unaffiliated voters. We are well aware of public opinion that thinks the prime minister lacks leadership."

Minshuto gains confidence from absorbing swing votes

Minshuto thinks it has succeeded in absorbing swing votes in the Feb. 4 elections by making Health, Labor, and Welfare Minister Hakuo Yanagisawa's gaffe a campaign issue.

Secretary General Yukio Hatoyama said yesterday: "I hear that one

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out of every three persons gave serious thought to Yanagisawa's comment in casting their votes. Each ballot carried significant weight."

The largest opposition party, which had failed to make its presence felt in the Wakayama, Yamanashi, Ehime, and Miyazaki gubernatorial elections, fielded its own candidates for the Feb. 4 races in order to force the ruling coalition to fight uphill battles. Confidence is spreading among Minshuto lawmakers that offering more options to voters for a tenser atmosphere would help the party win the hearts of those critical of the ruling coalition.

The Minshuto leadership is aware, however, that swing voters' support for their party is so transient that it might not last until the Upper House election.

Minshuto President Ichiro Ozawa, speaking to the press in Matsuyama City yesterday, said: "(The health, labor, and welfare minister's remarks) had an impact on the latest elections, but I don't think it was a major factor." The Feb. 4 elections exposed challenges for Minshuto, as well. For one thing, the party's strategy of making the Yanagisawa gaffe a campaign issue was insufficient to win female votes.

The Asahi Shimbun exit polls showed that the Minshuto-backed candidate in the Kitakyushu race won more female votes than the LDP-New Komeito candidate did. But in the Aichi race, the ruling coalition-baked candidate won 52% of the female votes, against the opposition candidate's 42%. Minshuto remains unpopular among female voters. "Attracting female voters has been a challenge over the last ten years. (Expanding the support base) will not be easy," a senior Minshuto lawmaker said.

(5) Controversial remarks by Defense Minister Akio Kyuma and Foreign Minister Taro Aso

SANKEI (Page 5) (Full)
February 6, 2007

Satoshi Morimoto, director of Takushoku University Overseas Affairs Research Center: Inappropriate in political terms

Defense Minister Akio Kyuma and Foreign Minister Taro Aso have made remarks questioning the validity of the Iraq war. It is politically inappropriate for the foreign minister and the defense minister, who in their respective positions represent the people of Japan, one of the closest allies of the US, to say that the Iraq war was a mistake or that the US policy toward Iraq is extremely naive.

In my view, the US decision to open war with Iraq was appropriate in light of international law. I think that it was also correct that the Japanese government supported the US decision. Because of the US action, the Hussein regime collapsed and terrorism was contained.

Some in the international community presumably took the position of opposing the Iraq war. The US admittedly did not give full account on its launching of operations only for the reason of Iraq possessing weapons of mass destruction. However, President Bush himself admitted that the assumption was not correct. The US has recently revised its Iraq policy. History will tell whether it was a right move or not. This is something that should be evaluated or analyzed after the US ends its occupation policy. Whether the US action was correct or not is a matter to be overviewed and

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determined by the US people.

Aso and Kyuma have probably voiced their views as individuals. Now that the situation in Northeast Asia is unstable, Japan must rely on the US, its ally. With that in mind, the Japanese government has dispatched Self-Defense forces to Iraq. At such a time, the cabinet ministers in charge of the Japan-US alliance should not have said that the US policy toward Iraq was wrong.

Koji Murata, professor at Doshisha University: No friction will occur

Remarks made by Foreign Minister Taro Aso and Defense Minister Akio Kyuma over the US Iraq policy will have no major impact on the Japan-US alliance. Opposition parties and media institutions are

making an issue over their remarks. It means that they have no other materials to use in attacking the Abe administration.

I am not sure whether the word "naive" used by Aso was proper or not. When he said "naive," he did not refer to the cause for the war. He meant that the US occupation policy in Iraq has not been adequate. President Bush himself has admitted that. In that sense, there is no fundamental difference in the views of Japanese and US governments.

If you listen to Mr. Aso's entire remark, you will know that he noted the importance of the Japan-US alliance. It is questionable to pick up one particular part of his speech and make an issue over it. Given the purport of the remark, no friction will occur between the two countries.

Right from the opening of the war, Mr. Kyuma's position has been that it will be fine for the Japanese government to understand the war, instead of supporting it. I believe he referred to this original view of his in his recent remark. The problem is, however, he repeatedly has made such a remark, planting the seeds of distrust, though he might have made the series of remarks as a kind of strategic bargaining toward the US. He has provided opposition parties with material to attack, saying that there is discord in the cabinet. This has worsened the position of the government.

The US is not reacting that strongly. However, if the Japanese media and opposition parties make a fuss over the issue, the American public might respond to it. Even if such a thing occurs, it will probably not affect the bilateral alliance.

(6) Potential uses of base land after reversion in Okinawa's central, southern parts (Part 1): Prologue; Camp Kinser's overall return in package with Futenma relocation unexpected to Urasoe City; Municipal officials upset at conditional return; No schedule in sight, local government at loss

RYUKYU SHIMPO (Top play) (Full)
January 31, 2006

Tokyo and Washington have now finalized a report of their talks over the planned realignment of US forces in Japan, incorporating an agreement to return the sites of US military bases and facilities in Okinawa's main island on a large scale. Judging from their location and size, the sites of these bases and facilities have considerable potential. However, there is still no detailed information about when the sites will be returned to local hands. As it stands, many landowners and base-hosting localities are at a loss. This series

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verifies how the sites of bases returned in the past have been used and looks into local efforts and challenges for the large-scale reversion of bases in the central and southern parts of Okinawa's main island.

Route 58, a national road running through the island, is where traffic is always snarled up with bumper-to-bumper gridlock. In contrast to its chronically heavy traffic, there is an area of warehouses standing in silence with an overall length of about three kilometers along its western side. The area is the Makiminato Service Area, a facility of the US Marine Corps, and it is called Camp Kinser.

During the Vietnam War, the warehouses on Camp Kinser stored war-reserve supplies. In addition, Camp Kinser was where bodies were kept and bloody vehicles were washed. In those days, Camp Kinser was in full operation as a base in the rear to support US military operations on the front. Nowadays, the base has fallen silent, quite different from what it used to be in those days.

Now, Camp Kinser is a quiet base. In the past, however, there were accidents and incidents involving US servicemen based there. In addition, a fire broke out there in 1997 and panicked nearby local residents. In 2000, uranium-tipped shell casings, mixed in iron scraps sold to locals, were discovered on the private premises in the town of Nishihara. As seen from such events, the base harmed

local communities in its vicinity.

Japan and the United States formally agreed on the overall return of Camp Kinser in a report finalized in May 2006 on the realignment of US forces in Japan.

The words "overall return" were long awaited by Urasoe City, which hosts Camp Kinser. These two words were incorporated in the final report. "I couldn't believe it," said Hidemori Mekaru, director of the Planning Division of the Planning Department of the Urasoe city government. "I was really surprised," Mekaru recalled. At that time, Mekaru was sure of the city's development.

In 1996, Japan and the United States finalized a report of intergovernmental agreements reached in the Japan-US Special Action Committee on Facilities and Areas in Okinawa (SACO). The final report of SACO specified a plan to relocate the Naha Port Facility--also known as the Naha military port--to a site on the western coast of Urasoe City. Mekaru was then in the Planning Division of the city's municipal government, and he gave explanations to local residents about the military port's planned relocation as a base reversion project. In those days, however, the military port could not be expected to return into local hands, according to Mekaru. "There was no atmosphere or reality for creating the plan," Mekaru said. After the SACO final report, however, Urasoe shifted its stance from "preparing for the military port's return" to "shaping the city's ideal future." Mekaru happened to experience two turning points with the final reports of SACO agreements and USFJ realignment agreements. "It's a strange turn of Fortune's wheel," Mekaru said. With this, he is envisioning how to use the port facility's site after its return.

On Dec. 22, 2005, Urasoe City's Mayor Mitsuo Gima called at the Defense Agency, where he met with the agency's administrative deputy director general, Takemasa Moriya. "The government has expropriated the military port over the past 60 years," Gima said. The mayor went on, "It's outrageous that the government attached conditions to the

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military port's return after making the decision on its return." So saying, the mayor came out with his anger. Japan and the United States have agreed on the relocation of Futenma airfield, whereas the sites of US military bases and facilities in the central and southern parts of Okinawa will not be returned as long as there is no progress in the planned relocation of Futenma airfield to Henoko in the city of Nago. The military port is among those US military bases and facilities in Okinawa's central and southern localities, so the military port is also in a package with Futenma relocation. The mayor was upset at this precondition.

In 1980, the city's officials created a blueprint for the city's reuse of the military port's site after its return. In the past, they have retouched the blueprint. The military port's return in a package with Futenma relocation was unexpected to the city. "How can we accept such a precondition?" With this, all in the Planning Division were dissatisfied. This fact depicts a base-hosting locality at the mercy of Japan-US realignment talks.

(7) US media cynically report on Yanagisawa's remark, saying "baby-making machines are also voters"

MAINICHI (Page 6) (Full)
Evening, February 6, 2007

Hiroaki Wada, Washington

Focusing on Health, Labor and Welfare Minister Hakuo Yanagisawa's controversial remark calling women baby-making machines, the major US media, including CNN TV, the Los Angeles Times, and Time Magazine (electronic edition), reported on Feb. 5 that "a number of difficult problems lie ahead of the ruling parties in Japan," with analysis attached of the present state of the Abe administration, which is suffering from plummeting public support rates.

In its popular morning program, CNN cited the Yanagisawa remark as "one of the articles that received the largest number of hits on our

website this morning." The newscaster then made this cynical comment: "Since those 'baby-making machines' are also voters, (the minister) had no choice but to apologize."

The Los Angeles Times carried an article dispatched from its Tokyo correspondent on the political situation in Japan. The article analyzed that the Abe government has been in disarray, affected by a series of political gaffes, such as Foreign Minister Aso's criticism of the US Iraq occupation policy as "naive" and Defense Minister Fumio Kyuma's comment calling the US decision to launch the Iraq war "a mistake," not to mention the Yanagisawa remark. Time noted: "In Japan, male chauvinism is publicly accepted. But even in such a country, the (Yanagisawa) remark upset women."

(8) Health Minister Yanagisawa makes another provocative remark at press briefing this morning: "Having two children or more is a healthy hope"

MAINICHI online news
February 6, 2007

Tatsuya Tamaki

Emerging from a cabinet meeting this morning, Health Minister Hakuo Yanagisawa again offered an apology for his recent provocative remark calling "women child-bearing machines," saying, "I'd like to

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offer my apology for my inappropriate remark." Reiterating his intention not to step down from the post, Yanagisawa stressed firmly, "I'll do what I can do to carry out my duties." When asked about measures to halt the falling birthrate, Yanagisawa stated: "We must consider a policy approach that will meet the very healthy hope (of young people) who want to have two or more children after they get married."

Health Minister Yanagisawa's remark "A couple with two children is healthy" raises doubts

ASAHI online news
February 6, 2007, 13:07p.m.

Health Minister Yanagisawa's latest remark seems likely to create another stir. The new remark cropped up just before the opposition parties made a move to bring Diet management back to normal. Before the controversy over his old remark has yet to quiet down, Yanagisawa made another controversial comment at a press conference this morning, saying that young people were in a "healthy condition" because "they want to get married and to have two or more children."

SCHIEFFER